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SUBJECT: Montreal Outreach on WHTI

¶1. Summary. The visit of DHS US-Visit Director Jim Williams and Department of States Ann Barrett, Managing Director of U.S. Passport Services, gave post an opportunity to get our message about WHTI out to a number of influential audiences and journalists in Montreal. Exports to the U.S. are extremely important for Quebec's economy. In 2004, exports to the U.S. accounted for \$57 billion, or 27% of the provinces GDP and 82% of its international exports. A recent study by Quebec's Ministry of Development found that one fifth of all jobs in Quebec are tied to international exports, of which an overwhelming majority are destined for the U.S. Given the immensity of this economic relationship, Quebecers have been anxious about the impact of WHTI regulations on their exports to the U.S., on their tourism industry, and on their close social and cultural ties. Mr. Williams and Ms. Barrett heard a broad range of concerns and queries from Canadian and American stakeholders in Montreal, dispelled misconceptions about WHTI, and underscored the U.S. aim to increase security and prosperity in North America. End summary.

What Quebec has at stake

¶2. Quebec's exports to the U.S. (\$57 billion in 2004) far outstrip its exports to the rest of Canada (valued at \$40 billion). A recent study by Quebec's Ministry of Development found that one fifth of all jobs in Quebec are tied to international exports, of which an overwhelming majority are destined for the U.S. An average of three million Quebecers visit the U.S. each year. At the Champlain-Lacolle Port of Entry alone, some 365,000 tourists cross into Quebec from New York State. Montreal alone had 1.28 million visitors from the U.S. in 2003. In 2004, more than 1.8 million trucks crossed the border between the U.S. and Quebec; some 64% of all the trade in goods between the U.S. and Quebec were shipped by truck. Given the immensity of this economic relationship and the substantial portion of the Quebec economy that hinges on its U.S. ties, Quebecers have expressed concern over the potential economic impact of WHTI. In an October 2005 letter, Quebec's contribution to the public comment period of the proposed rulemaking of WHTI, Premier Jean Charest noted that although the Government of Quebec fully supports the underlying objectives of the WHTI, it remains very concerned about the negative impact that the WHTI, in its current form, will have on trade, tourism, and the daily lifestyles of thousands of citizens in border communities in both the United States and Canada.

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¶3. An oft-quoted study by the Conference Board of Canada, released in July 2005, forecasts that the WHTI will result in a loss of 7.7 million trips from the U.S. to Canada between 2005 and 2008, but does not account for the impact that the appreciation of the Canadian dollar and higher gas prices have had on peoples decisions to travel. The Conference Board study forecasts that the WHTI requirements will significantly hurt the

profitability of the tourism industry, with U.S. citizens currently accounting for 2/3 of foreign tourism spending in Canada. Press reports in the Montreal Gazette noted that political leaders in many U.S. states that border Canada are also worried about the impact of the new documentation requirements, and will form "important allies" in Canada's fight to "restore sanity to border security." Even though new land border documentation requirements won't start to be phased in until the end of 2007, the Conference Board study claims that many people assume that new documentation requirements are already in place and, since "they can't be expected to consult a lawyer before making a day trip to Montreal or Vancouver, some now figure that a trip to Canada isn't worth the hassle." In addition, Quebec Ministry of International Relations' personnel have also indicated to Consulate officials their concern for a lack of information from the Canadian Federal government regarding Canadian plans. Since the provinces have responsibility for civil and identity documents (other than passports), provincial officials said they would welcome any collaboration to be able to better anticipate what will be required, if anything, on their part, and to ensure its compatibility with U.S. requirements.

ENGAGING QUEBEC STAKEHOLDERS

¶4. Jim Williams and Ann Barrett came to Montreal to address an April 27 event of the Border Trade Alliance, a non-profit organization that advocates policies and initiatives to improve border affairs and trade relations in North America. The Border Trade Alliance's board of directors recently approved a resolution on the implementation of WHTI that calls for the consideration of alternatives to the U.S. Passport and the PASS card for border crossers, such as the BCC; FAST, NEXUS, and

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SENTRI cards as well as the possibility of deadline extensions in order not to hinder efficient travel. At the Border Trade Alliance event, Mr. Williams and Ms. Barrett discussed WHTI implementation, stressed the USG's commitment to strengthen security without compromising trade and legitimate travel, and fielded questions about the likelihood that FAST and NEXUS cards would be accepted at land borders after December 31, 2007. Participants inquired whether and how DHS and STATE planned to get the word out to potential travelers about the PASS card or other acceptable travel documents. Williams and Barrett called on the business leaders to help provide accurate information and to be involved with finding the solution to make cross border movement more efficient and secure through WHTI.

¶5. During a lunch at the Consul General's Residence with Quebec government and tourism industry officials, there was vigorous discussion of how WHTI would be implemented and what stakeholders needed to be involved in ensuring both Americans and Canadians were kept informed. A Canadian Department of Transportation official mentioned renovations at the Champlain-Lacolle Port of entry, scheduled for completion in 2008, which will increase the number of truck lanes to nine and ten passenger lanes, including a bus lane and a NEXUS lane (there are currently four truck lanes and six passenger lanes.) These renovations, he said, combined with more streamlined procedures at the border under WHTI, stand to actually improve the flow of traffic at the border and reduce chokepoints that hinder trade and stall tourists. Tourist industry representatives were interested in outreach initiatives to ensure that the public was aware of the new requirements and how to meet them. Steps taken by the State Department's Passport Office were of particular interest. At the end of the day, the tourist industry itself will have to take a leading role in informing its clientele, even if they be across the border.

¶6. At a meeting with 17 economic stakeholders, Mr. Williams and Ms. Barrett dispelled misconceptions about WHTI and affirmed their commitment to increase security and prosperity in North America. From a Quebec municipal government official from the Champlain-Lacolle border area concerned about the impact of WHTI

on cross-border fire fighting, to a representative from Duty Free stores at the border who has taken to handing out passport applications to her customers, the WHTI spokespersons heard from a broad range of the concerns and queries from Canadian and American stakeholders in Montreal. The mayor of Stanstead, a

a small border community in Quebec, asked if DHS and State had considered the possibility of offering exemptions for senior citizens crossing the border. Many of my constituents are over 65, and they are worried about these new border regulations.

¶ 7. Three media events were organized to reach general Quebec audiences a roundtable with print journalists, a TV interview with Radio-Canada/CBC, and a radio interview with the Montreal all-news station 940AM. Media play from the visit, although buried beneath the softwood lumber deal, offered factual, positive coverage of WHTI. The press roundtable included journalists from three leading Montreal newspapers and as well as news service Canadian Press/Broadcast News. The two leading Montreal French language dailies, La Presse and Le Devoir, published articles clarifying the timeline and the goals of WHTI. Under the headline American officials on Operation Charm, La Presse quoted Mr. Williams as saying the USG goal is to catch tch terrorists, illegal immigrants and criminals, and to make crossing the border faster and easier for legitimate travelers, and as recognizing the unique border relationship. The last thing we want to have happen is for someone to cancel his/her trip because he/she does not have a passport. Le Devoir emphasized the PASScard, its potential features, its advantage over drivers licenses/birth certificates for establishing citizenship and identity, and its potential to facilitate, not hinder, crossing the border.

¶ 8. The Canadian Press posted article, picked up by the Winnipeg Free Press, focused on Mr. Williamss acknowledgement that the USG was aware of confusion over the regulations and had concerns about the economic impact of the initiative, but the article did not capture the larger context that DHS and State are striving to protect our borders without compromising economic prosperity or tourism. The English daily The Gazette chose not to

not to publish this time but the journalist commented he found the meeting very useful and will use the contents in future articles. Radio-Canada/CBC Ottawa political correspondents interview of Mr. Williams played positively to French speaking audiences on its newscast and its prestigious current affairs program, Le Point. In addition to the same themes covered by the print media, Radio Canada/CBC honed-in on the issue of privacy concerns. We understand Radio-Canada/CBC plans to use the taped interview for a more in-depth program. Finally, Montreals all-news radio station asked for comment on the fears of businessmen/tourism industry to which Mr. Williams again clarified the timeline and

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emphasized the facilitation factor of the potential PASScard. 940AM aired interview segments throughout the day.

¶ 9. The April 26 efforts in Montreal built on outreach already conducted by Consulate Quebec City. Quebec Citys Consul Strudwick and Consular Assistant Maciagowski discussed WHTI with eleven representatives of Quebec travel agencies and tourist boards. Individuals from the Quebec Ministry of International Relations (MRI) and large international tourist operators, such as cruise ships, were aware of the changes; the others had only incomplete information and had paid only occasional attention to the issue. Operators of US-bound tour buses reckoned they would be badly hurt by the new rules, since many of their customers make last minute travel plans. Post underlined the objectives of the WHTI, and pointed out the advantages to many Canadian travelers of securing a passport now, rather than wishing for a reversal of the new requirements. Quebec City is planning additional meetings with local stakeholders to raise awareness of WHTI and to get feedback on what is happening on the ground.

Comment

¶110. Prime Minister Harper had initially pledged to work with the U.S. to find a mutually agreeable solution to border crossing documents. However, more recent statements in late April by Canadian Public Security Minister Stockwell Day maintaining that Canada would not consider a new border crossing card in lieu of a passport have left many Canadians confused about the ultimate impact of WHTI and Canadas approach to the issue. Although the GOC appears to have accepted the reality of WHTI, many stakeholders in Montreal continue to oppose it. In both press events, the issue of privacy and what type of information would be kept surfaced though it was not included in print or radio reports. We expect this to remain a central concern for Canadians with regard to WHTI. Mr. Williams and Ms. Barretts Montreal speaking engagements left audiences with the message that by reducing the number of acceptable documents and making use of RDIF and other smart-card technology the WHTI offers an opportunity to improve border security while speeding up border crossing and increasing trade. Reductions in tourism could be minimized by keeping the public on both sides of the border aware of documentary requirements. Quebec Consulates outreach efforts, combined with more similar future visits by DHS/State teams will help to improve understanding of WHTI and minimize any disruptions to travel and trade.

CA/PPT Ann Barrett did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.

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